an introduction to

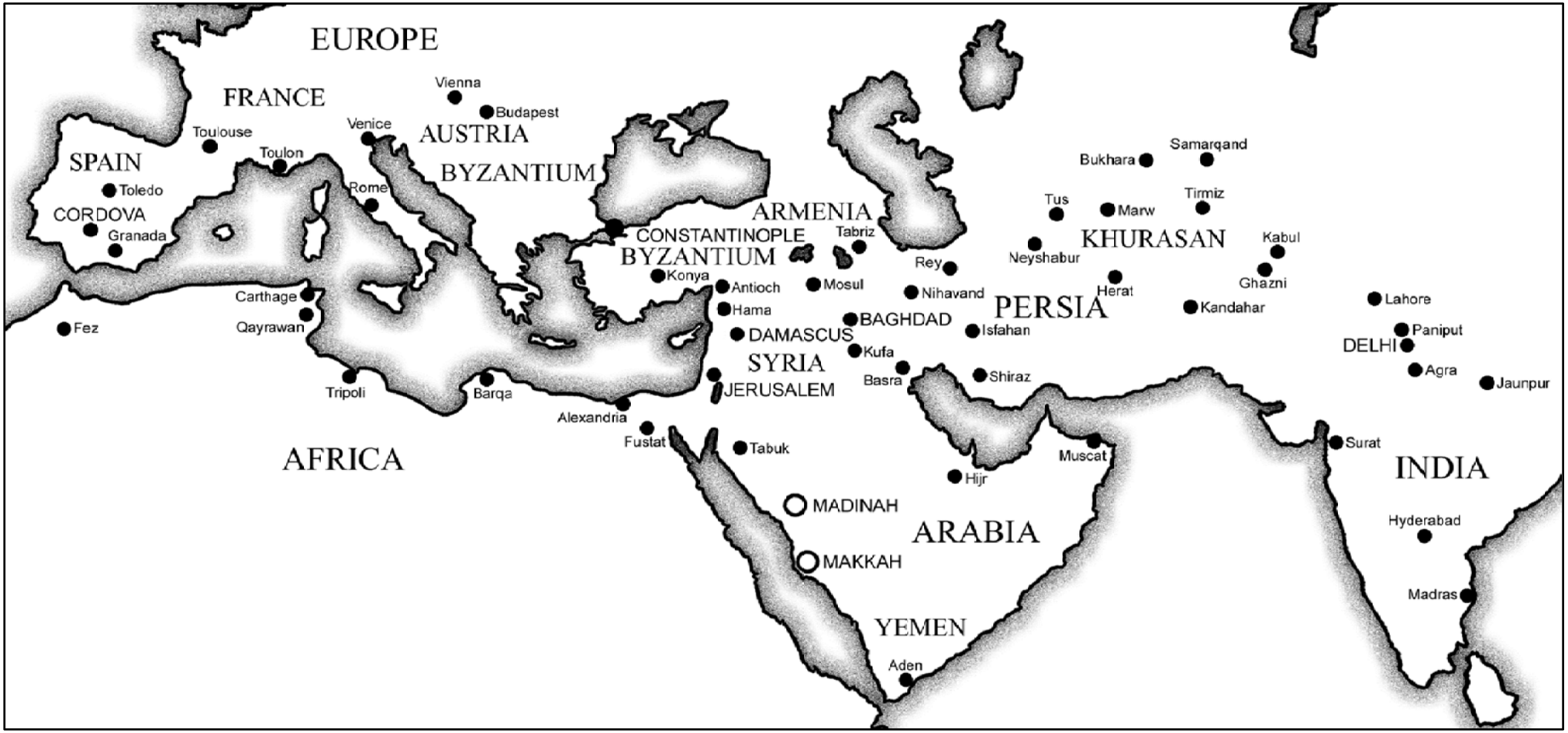


TASAWWUF

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INTRODUCTION *"…If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in two-thirds of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational beliefs, a founder of twenty terrestrial empires and one spiritual empire. Of all standards by which human greatness can be measured, we may well ask ... is there any man greater than Mohammed?..."*

Alphonse Lamartine, "Histoire de la Turquie".



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

AN INTRODUCTION TO TASAWWUF

By Mawlaanaa FEIZEL CHOTHIA

Allah declares in the Holy Qur'an :

هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"*Are those with knowledge equal to those without knowledge?"* (Qur'an, 39:9)

يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

"*Allah will raise the status of those who believe among you and who are given knowledge by degrees.*" (Qur'an, 58:11)

The Blessed Prophet Muhammad [s] spoke in truth :

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ

"If Allah intends goodness for someone, He gives him (fiqh) understanding of the religion."

إِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَإِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُوَرِّثُوا دِينَارًا وَلَا دِرْهَمًا وَرَّثُوا الْعِلْمَ

"Verily, the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets. They do not leave behind gold or silver coins, but rather they leave behind knowledge."

TASAWWUF

Linguistically, the word ‘ tasawwuf ’ means ‘purification’ or ‘wearing rough woollen garments’.

***NB**: The word ‘tasawwuf’ also originates from Ahl us-Suffah (literally, ‘the people of the platform’), the name given to those ascetic and indigent Muslims who devoted themselves to seeking Islaamic knowledge, worship and devotion and who lived on a raised platform in the Prophet’s [s] Masjid.*

Technically it refers to Islaamic mysticism, and is concerned with the search for deep spirituality through an inner journey that is undertaken to achieve profound awareness of Allaah and closeness to Him.

Those who embark on the journey of Tasawwuf (Islaamic spirituality) are referred to as Suufii or Saalik (wayfarer).

The roots of the Suufii way lie in the ascetic example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Sahaabah (Companions).

***NB**: In the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], Tasawwuf as a term did not exist, but was in fact part of the life of every Muslim. Thus, the first Suufiyaa’ (ie. plural of ‘Suufii’) were the Prophet [s], with his exemplary contemplative and ascetic lifestyle, and his Sahaabah (Companions).*

Tazkiyah (Self-purification)

The main feature of Tasawwuf is ‘ tazkiyah ’, or purification of the soul. In Tasawwuf observation of the Sharii’ah is certainly fundamental, however inner development of the soul is paramount.

Tasawwuf emphasises that to follow the Sharii’ah literally, without regard for the essence of Islaam (ie. love, mercy, patience, generosity, justice, equity, etc.) and without paying due attention to nurturing the soul (ie. moral purification and upliftment), would leave a Muslim leading an incomplete life.

The Qur’aan commands Muslims to be continuously engaged in the remembrance of Allaah (Dhikr, also spelt ‘ Zhikr ’), which is a central practice of Tasawwuf, and exhorts self-development and purification (Tazkiyah). The Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] therefore commanded to inner development of the soul

(Ruuh), as did his Sahaabah, most prominent of whom were Sayyidunaa Abuu Bakr [r] and Sayyidunaa ‘Alii [r].

Zuhd (Ascetism)

What is now known as Tasawwuf first exhibited itself as Zuhd (asceticism). Seeing the prosperity and material development that accompanied the conquests and expansion of Islaam, the ‘Ulamaa’ and Saalihuun (pious people) became concerned that a desire for the trappings of the world was taking precedence over the Qur’aan’s warnings against greed and indulgence. They taught that the only way to fortify Muslims against this Fitnah (temptation) was to become self-disciplined and to exert themselves in acts of worship (‘Ibaadah) and ascetic piety (Zuhd). However, a rigorous regime of self-discipline did not mean denying the joys of the world entirely and to live in celibate seclusion (saruurah or rahbaaniyyah). Rather, following the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], Muslims ascetics (Zuhhaad – plural of ‘ Zaahid ’) married, had families and lived within society, but as though they were not part of it, completely detached from its indulgences and desires.

The Development of Tasawwuf

From the 10th century onward, these ascetic (Zaahid) traditions began to form into organised schools of mysticism (Tasawwuf) known as Tariiqahs (singular – ‘ Tariiqah ’, plural – ‘ Turuk ’) meaning ‘paths’. Rules and methods derived from the teachings and practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Sahaabah were explained in meticulous detail to followers (Muriiduun, singular ‘ Muriid ’) that would help them, not simply to focus on moral upliftment and their inward lives, but rather to turn that attention toward Allaah, with Ma’rifah (gnosis - ie. intimate knowledge of the Eternal Perfect One, Allaah) as their sole aim. According to the schools of Tasawwuf, this could not be achieved alone; the seeker (Saalik) must attach himself to a competent spiritual teacher (Murshid).

While the ‘Ulamaa’ of Fiqh and Kalaam focussed on Sharii’ah and ‘Aqiidah (theology), the ‘Ulamaa’ of Tasawwuf, or Murshiduun (spiritual guides), were concerned primarily with moral upliftment and spiritual development. While observing the Sharii’ah and strict adherence to the ‘Aqiidah of Islaam are necessary for any practicing Muslim, the path of Tasawwuf extended Islaamic practice to not merely the letter of the law, but on purifying the heart from everything except Allaah. For the Suufiyaa’, seeking Allaah’s pleasure alone is more important than anything else, even the self.

Amongst the many authentic Turuk (singular – ‘ Tariiqah ’) that emerged, the most prominent are the Qaadirii, Chishtii and Naqshbandii, all of which are named after their founders. Other Turuk include the Suhrawardii, Shaadhilii, Rifaa’ii, Khalwatii, Baa ‘Alawii, Tijaanii, Darqawii, Bayramii, Jalwatii, and Mawlawii, etc.

These Turuk (Suufii orders) operate globally and have hundreds of millions of members. The members or followers of a Tariiqah are known as Muriiduun (singular - ‘Muriid ’), meaning ‘desirous’ or ‘aspirant’, referring to their ‘desiring to truly know Allaah and aspiring to love Him as is His due’.

The Distinctive Features of Tasawwuf

Tasawwuf teaches that neither practicing the Sharii’ah nor Iimaan alone, is sufficient for perfect adherence to the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s]. This is because It is possible to follow the rules of the Sharii’ah for one’s own personal motives and without faith in Allaah (ie. being a Munaafiq – hypocrite). It is also possible to have faith in Allaah without being earnest in this faith and without becoming a person characterized by humility, charity, compassion, and love (ie. being Haqiir – ignoble).

Tasawwuf attempts to bring about perfect Islaamic faith and practice by developing the spiritual and moral qualities implicit in Islaam (but not necessarily actualized by all Muslims) through correct behaviour and correct thinking. These inner attitudes and character traits marked the Prophet Muhammad’s [s] personality (Akhlaaq). Tasawwuf teaches Muslims not only to act like the Prophet [s] (ie. Islaam) and to think like him (ie. Iimaan), but also to be aware, like him, of Allaah’s presence in all things and at all times, including within one-self, and to behave beautifully and appropriately (Ihsaan) under all circumstances.

Tasawwuf in Practice

Suufii practice is based on the fundamental idea that Allaah is love. The only aim of the Suufii therefore is to love Allaah, and thereafter to project this love to His creation at large.

Tasawwuf can be summarised as the fulfilment of the Qur’aan and Sunnah directive to worship Allaah with love as if you see Him before you, just as a lover

gazes in infatuation at his beloved standing before him, never turning his gaze away from the beloved to another. This emphasis on inner focus on 'Allaah alone' is ardently promoted by the schools of Tasawwuf which insist that the Suufii should not even wear noticeably different clothes, because outward appearance should not be the hallmark of a Suufii, but rather only inner focus on the Divine.

Because ' love ' is, in essence, the recognition and pursuit of attributes of perfection, Suufiyaa' (plural of 'Suufii') are seekers of Ma'rifah (ie. gnosis or recognition of Allaah's perfect attributes) and knowledge of the spiritual mysteries of Divine love, which cannot be attained until the Nafs (' ego ' or ' self '), which obstructs this pursuit, has been subdued and fully controlled through prescribed devotional practices like Dhikr (formulas of remembrance of Allaah), voluntary acts of 'Ibaadah (worship) and service to humanity & creation at large.

Body and Spirit

While humankind is both body and spirit, the body is understood to be that earthly element (an-Nafs ul-Ammaarah, translated as ' instinct ' or ' desire '), which when not disciplined, alienates humanity from Allaah. Tasawwuf teaches that a rigorous programme of Dhikr, Muraaqabah (contemplation), 'Ibaadah, Tahajjud (night vigil prayer) and voluntary Sawm (fasting), for example, is necessary in order to discipline the Nafs, purify the soul (Ruuh) and ' bridle ' the body.

Only in this way, can the 'ever-reproachful soul' (an-Nafs ul-Lawwaamah, also translated as ' conscience ') be nurtured and become the ' contented soul ' (an-Nafs ul-Mutma'innah), at peace and in communion with the Divine, like a lover at peace in the arms of the beloved.

So, like a bridled horse, only when disciplined can the body allow its rider (ie. soul) to reach the destinations true end (ie. Allaah's good pleasure and love).

Tasawwuf teaches that, like a lover who continuously calls out the name of the beloved, the constant recitation of Allaah's divine names (Asmaa') and His praises purifies the heart of all else until it is ready to receive divine grace (ie. Allaah's clear guidance and true love). Just as love is jealous and accepts no partners, so too does Allaah only love those who cleanse their hearts of all else. According to Tasawwuf, the legal injunctions of Islaam (Sharii'ah) are truly valid

only if performed with Allaah's presence in mind, and seeking His pleasure alone.

Spiritual Stations and States

Tasawwuf teaches that knowing Allaah is such a challenging pursuit that it cannot be achieved without an experienced guide or teacher (Murshid). The Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], himself the supreme guide (al-Murshid ul-Kaamil) who showed the true way to Allaah, is the precedent for this requirement of Tasawwuf. Allaah bestows this sacred task on purified souls who themselves have travelled the same journey (Suluuk) to Him. These Murshiduun (plural of 'Murshid') are usually affiliated to established schools of Tasawwuf.
(NB: Some prominent schools of Tasawwuf will be discussed later in the lesson).

Suufii orders (Tariiqahs), like the schools of Fiqh and Kalaam, trace their chain of authority (Silsilah), to the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Sahaabah (Companions), especially Sayyidunaa Abuu Bakr [r] (the first Khaliif of Islaam) and Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] (the fourth Khaliif of Islaam).

Each spiritual aspirant (Muriid) is required to attach himself to such a authentic guide (Murshid) (who can be male or female), who will prescribe him various spiritual exercises and physical services to perform. The stages of development of the Suufii are described as Maqaamaat (stations, plural of ' Maqaam '), and include tawbah (repentance), sabr (patience), shukr (gratitude), ridaa (acceptance), tawakkul (trust) and mahabbah (love).

While on this path, a Suufii will experience various transcendent spiritual states (Ahwaal), such as Khawf (fear) and Rajaa (hope). The Maqaamaat (stations) are permanent spiritual changes gained through acts of devotion, whereas states (Ahwaal) are temporary, and dependent on the grace and favour of Allaah in the moment.

Finally, through the stations of Mahabbah (love) and Ma'rifah (gnosis), the Suufii reaches the position of Fanaa (self-annihilation or self-negation), like a lover losing himself in the beloved, after which he then exists and dwells (Baqaa) wholly in and for Allaah.

This union with Allaah is not in a physical sense, but rather the Suufii or Saalik becomes one with the Divine will, rather than actually joining with the essence of Allaah.

The notion of becoming one with the essence of the Divine is blasphemous and is condemned in Islaam. It is associated with false pagan belief systems like the concept of ‘Nirvana’ or ‘Moksha’ in Hinduism and Buddhism , which is erroneous and flatly rejected in Islaam.

Features of the schools of Tasawwuf

The schools of Tasawwuf celebrate the Divine in many different ways. While some have very strict devotional acts such as silent meditation and consecutive fasting, others have trance-like dance movements like the whirling dervishes. Some have musical accompaniment to songs of glorification like the Qawwaals, and others compose sacred poetry and literature like the works of Imaam al-Ghazaalii [rh], Mawlaanaa Jalaal ud-Diin Ruumii [rh] and Fariid ud-Diin Attaar [rh].

Tasawwuf has produced a network of Murshiduun (guides or teachers) who operate under inspiration from Allaah (Ilhaam) and who are directed to invite humanity to realise absolute truth and, in so doing, bring peace and love to the world. These Murshiduun hold different ranks with Allaah (some nearer to Him than others, the closest called ‘ Abdaal ’) and always adhere to authentic Tariiqahs. All these Turuk (ie. plural of ‘ Tariiqah ’) have their own retreats or lodges (called ‘ Zaawiyah ’ or ‘ Khaanqaah ’) and welcome any seeker (Saalik) at their door without prejudice.

The Chishtii Tariiqah, which converted masses of Hindus in India, is well known for its Qawwaalii devotional music. In North Africa, the Shaadhilii Tariiqah originated in Tunisia but now has a large following in the West. In Turkey, the Mevlevi (Mawlawii) Tariiqah, following the teachings of Mawlaanaa Jalaal ud-Diin Ruumii [rh], is renowned for its whirling dervishes. The Naqshbandii Tariiqah spread from Daghestan, in the Caucus, to India and Turkey and is famous for its silent meditation (Muraaqabah).

Muhy-id-Diin Ibn ul-‘Arabii [rh]

The greatest of all scholars of Tasawwuf was Ibn ul-‘Arabii [rh] (his full name is Abuu ‘Abd Allaah Muhammad ibn ‘Alii ibn Muḥammad ibn ul-‘Arabii al-Haatimii al-Taa’ii) , who was born in al-Andalus, now known as Spain, in 1165 CE and died in Damascus in 1240 CE. His voluminous writings investigate every aspect of Tasawwuf with unparalleled brilliance and penetration. No one, after

the Qur'aan and the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], has had more influence on the way Muslims have thought about Allaah for the past six hundred years.

The Founders of the Most Prominent Schools of Tasawwuf

1) **Abd ul-Qaadir al-Jiilaanii [rh]**
470-561 AH [1077-1166 CE]

Islaam has produced the world's greatest spiritual teachers, sanctified men and women who devoted their entire lives to acquiring a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of creation, and humanity's role in this vast universe. Unlike the philosophers, theologians and scientists, their methodology was to 'experience' knowledge, and not merely know. According to them, the universe and the human soul are not mere abstract concepts which are independent of each other, for at a certain level all things are inter-connected and inter-dependent, all ultimately linked to a single principle.

These great spiritual teachers were eager to understand the true nature of reality, that is to say, they sought to transcend the shallow 'exterior', and plunge into the ocean of the 'inner' meanings of all things in order to attain 'experiential' knowledge and understanding which would enable them to journey ever closer to the Divine — the origin of all that exists. One of the Muslim world's most influential and revered Suufii's was the great Murshid, 'Abd ul-Qaadir al-Jiilaanii [rh].

Sayyid Muhy-id-Diin, Abuu Muhammad 'Abd ul-Qaadir Hasanii al-Jiilaanii [rh] was born in 1078 CE in Nif, a district town of Jiilaan in the province of Tabaristan, located on the coast of the Caspian Sea in Persia. His family traced their lineage back to Sayyidunaa Hasan [r], the eldest son of Khaliif 'Alii ibn abii Taalib [r] and grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s.

Abuu Saalih, his pious father died when he was a child, but his equally pious mother, Umm ul-Khayr Faatimah, raised him with the support of her scholarly and saintly father, 'Abdullaah as-Sumaa'ii [rh], who was a descendant of Sayyidunaa Husayn [r], the second son of Khaliif 'Alii [r]. 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] received his early education in Arabic grammar, committed the whole Qur'aan to memory and studied Hadiith at home under the supervision of his mother and grandfather. He then began his formal education at a local Madrasah when he

was about ten. Thereafter, he pursued his intermediate studies at local religious seminaries and acquired a good knowledge of the traditional Islaamic sciences as well as Tasawwuf before he reached his eighteenth birthday.

In 1095 CE, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] left his native Jiilaan and journeyed to Baghdad, which was the capital of the Muslim world at the time. However, on his way to Baghdad his caravan was surrounded by a group of robbers who seized all the travellers’ belongings by force. When one of the robbers asked young ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] if he had any valuables on him, to the surprise of the robber, he replied, “Yes indeed ! My mother had stitched forty gold coins in my sleeves so it would not be easily found by others.” At first the robber did not take him seriously, presumably because he thought the youngster was amusing him. But when the leader of the gang questioned ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] and demanded to see the hidden gold coins, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] opened up his sleeves and showed him the money. The robbers found his behaviour very puzzling and were intrigued. When they asked him why he admitted to having the gold coins, to their amazement, he replied, “My mother’s parting advice to me were that I should always speak the truth. Since denying that I had any money on me would have been to utter a falsehood, I decided to tell the truth.” ‘Abd ul-Qaadir’s [rh] admirable truthfulness and honesty stirred the robbers’ conscience and they fell to the ground, begging for his forgiveness and clemency. Appreciative for the lesson in good behavior and morality, the robbers returned all the goods they had seized from the people, and pledged to reform themselves and change their evil ways.

After a long and eventful journey, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] finally reached Baghdad. At the time Baghdad was a thriving centre of Islaamic learning and vibrant commercial activity. To his surprise, he found the people of Baghdad very friendly and hospitable. Although joining the Baghdad branch of the famous Nizhaamiyyah Colleges (which were founded in 1065 by the celebrated Seljuk Prime Minister, Nizhaam ul-Mulk [rh]) would have been an attractive option, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] decided instead to study Arabic grammar, literature, Tafsiir (Qur’aanic exegesis), Hadiith and Fiqh (Islaamic jurisprudence), especially Hanbalii Fiqh, under the guidance of Baghdad’s leading ‘Ulamaa’.

He paid for his educational and living costs out of the forty gold coins his mother had given him, but when the money eventually ran out he began to experience considerable hardship. His financial situation became so dire that he was not always able to afford even a simple meal to eat. Despite these hardships, putting

his trust in Allaah, he remained optimistic and was determined to complete his tertiary Islaamic education.

Known for his love of Hadiith, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] studied the subject in detail under the supervision of a number of prominent Muhaddithuun (traditionists) including Shaykh Abuu Ghaalib Ahmad [rh], Shaykh Abul Qaasim ‘Alii [rh] and Abu Muhammad Ja'far as-Sarraaj [rh]. During this period he also studied Arabic literature under the guidance of Abuu Zakariyyaa Yahyaa at-Tabriizii [rh], who was an authority on Arabic literature and the principal of Baghdad’s prestigious Nizhaamiyyah College. In addition to this, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] received thorough training in Hambalii legal thought and methodology under the tutelage of Baghdad’s leading Hambalii Fuqahaa’ (jurists), including Abuu Sa’iid Mubaarak ibn ul-Mukharrimii Makhzuumii [rh] and Ibn ‘Aqiil [rh]. In later life ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] subscribed to both the Shaafi’ii and Hambalii schools of law. He placed Shaafi’ii jurisprudence (Fiqh) on an equal footing with the Hambalii Madh’hab, and used to issue Fatwaa (religious edicts) according to both of them simultaneously.

After completing his formal education, he studied at the feet of Shaykh Abul Khayr Hammaad ibn Muslim ad-Dabbaas [rh] who inspite of not knowing how to read and write, was a prominent, authority on Islaamic spirituality and Ma’rifah (gnosis), and received formal training in Tasawwuf from him. Under Shaykh ad-Dabbaas’s [rh] instruction ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] not only learnt the theories and methods of Tasawwuf, but also became exposed to a whole new universe of meaning, purpose and spiritual elevation - one where the inner significance and implication of religious teachings became clear to him for the first time.

The move from the ‘text’ to the ‘spirit of the text’ enabled ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] to elevate his soul and continue his quest for spiritual growth and fulfilment. Being a Suufii himself, the Hambalii Faqiih (jurist), Abuu Sa’iid [rh], also played a decisive role in ‘Abd ul-Qaadir’s [rh] early spiritual quest. He personally guided him in the methods and practices of Tasawwuf, until the latter had attained complete mastery of the spiritual sciences and gnosis of the Divine, whereupon he conferred on him the robe of an initiate (Muriid) to Tasawwuf.

During this period ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] earned his livelihood by cultivating crops and vegetables, and, interestingly, only spoke when it was absolutely required. After living amidst the ruins of Madaa’in (Ctesiphon) like a hermit for eleven years, in 1117 CE, at the age of forty, ‘Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] finally returned to Baghdad where he soon gained a reputation as a gifted commentator (Mufassir)

of the Qur'aan, Ahaadiith (Prophetic traditions), Hambalii Fiqh and Shaykh (Master) of Tasawwuf. This prompted the local scholars to appoint him head of the same Madrasah (Islaamic seminary) where his former mentor Abuu Sa'iid [rh] once served as principal.

It was during this period that the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] appeared to 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] in a true dream and advised him to preach Islaam and admonish the people of the land. At the time 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] was fully engaged in lecturing on all the Islaamic sciences, showing no desire nor inclination to become engaged in social activism or popular dissemination (Da'wah) of Islaam. However, his mystical encounter with the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], coupled with the encouragement he received from Khwaajah Yuusuf Hamdaanii [rh], an illustrious sage of Baghdad of the time, prompted him to begin delivering public lectures on all aspects of Islaamic teaching and practice, in order to encourage and inspire the people at large to lead a devout Islaamic life based strictly on the teachings of the Qur'aan and Sunnah.

As a prominent 'Aalim (scholar) of all the traditional Islaamic sciences as well as a master of Tasawwuf, 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] was able to interpret Islaamic teachings in a traditional yet profoundly spiritually insightful way such that both the 'Ulamaa' as well as the Suufiyaa would sit side by side to benefit from his inspiring lectures on all aspects of Islaam, without raising any objections whatsoever.

His remarkable and unique ability to synthesise the Islaamic legal tradition with Islaamic spirituality and explain it in an easily understood way to the masses made him a hugely popular figure during his lifetime. 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] became so famous that the college grounds where he used to deliver his talks regularly overflowed, as thousands of people flocked from all over to hear him speak. To accommodate the large crowds attending his lectures, the houses adjacent to his college were later purchased and demolished to create more space for the attendees. Thanks to his intellectual brilliance and unique style of delivery, thousands of non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians, embraced Islaam and the masses of ordinary Muslims began to devote themselves so much more to a life of piety and righteousness. Indeed, he became one of the first Suufiyaa' in the annals of Islaam to acquire such a mass following.

'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii's [rh] ability to transcend sectarian differences and political barriers encouraged the leading 'Ulamaa' (Scholars), Fuqahaa' (Jurists), Suufiyaa' (mystics), Du'aat (preachers) and the political leaders and rulers of his

day to set their differences aside, and unite under the banner of Islaam. He used to deliver lectures three times a week: on Friday morning before the weekly Friday Jumu'ah Salaah (congregational prayer); on Tuesday evening, and also on Sunday mornings. More than seventy thousand people used to attend his lectures at any one time and around four hundred scribes used to write down his talks for the benefit of those unable to attend.

'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii [rh] enjoyed this unique success and popularity because he was able to synthesize every aspect of Islaam in manner that was within the capacity of everyone to understand and practice. Not surprisingly, he did not consider himself to be either a Suufii or Faqiih; he did not believe in one without the other. He was able to reconcile the mystical nature of Tasawwuf with the sober demands of Islaamic Law.

'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii [rh] was a strict adherent of the Sunnah and Sharii'ah, emphasizing the importance of leading a balanced and moderate lifestyle, and always focusing on the primary need to purify one's heart, mind and conduct. Like the famous Junayd al-Baghdaadii [rh] before him'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii [rh] was a 'sober' Suufii, who strictly avoided the path of spiritual 'intoxication' pursued by other Suufiyaa like Abuu Yaziid al-Bistaamii [rh] and Husayn ibn Mansuur al-Hallaaj [rh]. Unlike some Suufiyaa' who completely renounced the world, 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] married and participated in the day to day life of the ordinary people, ensuring that his personal and public life were always strictly in accordance with the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s]. His contribution to the revival of the Sunnah thus earned him the coveted title of Muhy-id-Diin (The Reviver of True Religion) during his own lifetime.

Thanks to his band of dedicated scribes, 'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii's [rh] lectures were preserved in the form of books and manuscripts for the benefit of posterity. They include the book Al-Fath ur-Rabbaanii (The Divine Disclosure) which contains sixty-two sermons delivered between 1150 and 1152 CE; Al-Ghunyah lit-Taalibii Tariiq il-Haqq (That Which Suffices the Seekers of the True Path), wherein he explained the normative Islaamic principles and practices in considerable detail, and Futuuh ul-Ghayb (Disclosure of the Unseen), which consists of seventy-eight sermons on the mystical dimensions of Islaam, and was compiled by his son, 'Abd ur-Razzaaq. Inspired by the Qur'aan and Prophetic wisdom, more than twenty-four books and manuscripts have been attributed to 'Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii [rh].

Amongst his famous sayings is, “Dear Friend, Your Heart is a polished mirror. You must wipe it clean of the veil of dust which has gathered upon it, because it is destined to reflect the light of divine secrets.” He would urge the negligent masses saying, “O disobedient ones, do not despair of the mercy of Allaah! Never lose hope of Allaah’s generosity. O you who are dead at heart, keep on remembering your Lord, recite His Book and the words of His Messenger, and attend the gatherings of Dhikr (remembrance of Allaah). This will certainly quicken your hearts like the earth is revived by the falling rain.” To the rich and powerful he would say, “Many wealthy people, because of greed, are in fact poor and needy. In reality the brave person is he who wrestles and defeats the devil of greed, and thereafter becomes independent, without want or need, for this material World.” And to seekers of truth he advised, “First there is ignorance, thereafter knowledge, then follows practice upon one’s knowledge, thereafter sincerity upon that action, and finally comes understanding and wisdom in the heart.” And to the Muslims at large he warned, “To turn your face towards the creation is to turn your back towards Allaah.”

His unique and hugely influential explication of Tasawwuf led to the emergence of one of the most influential spiritual movements in the annals of Islaam. Named after him, the Qaadiriyyah Suufii order is today followed by millions of people throughout the Muslim world. The majority of the Suufii theoreticians and practitioners who came after him were in one way or another influenced by his religious ideas and spiritual practices. These include Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh], Shihaab ud-Diin Umar as-Suhrawardii [rh] and Muhyid-Diin ibn ul-‘Arabii [rh]. Aware of his immense influence and standing, the Suufiyaa of old have remarked, “The foot of ‘Abd ul-Qaadir Jiilaanii [rh] is on the head of every saint.” He died in 1166 CE at the venerable age of eighty-nine and was buried in Baghdad.

2) **Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh]**
536-633 AH [1142-1236 CE]

All the famous Suufii Orders, like the Qaadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah and Shaadhiliyyah, trace their spiritual lineage back to the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] through his closest Companion. As mentioned in the previous biography, during the early days of Islaam, Tasawwuf was a reality amongst all Muslims without the label, but after the great conquests of Islaam, and the tremendous wealth and opulence it brought to Muslim society, crass materialism and the influx of anti-Islaamic attitudes and practices crept into the

Islaamic world. This state of affairs prompted prominent Islaamic scholars (‘Ulamaa’) and Suufiyaa (Mystics) to oppose the spread of hedonism and immorality which threatened the wellbeing of Islaamic societies at the time.

It was a critical period in Islaamic history, when the decline in ‘Abbaasid political power and authority, coupled with the intrusion of foreign intellectual and cultural influences, began to undermine Prophetic values, principles and practices. During this testing period in Islaamic history, a number of influential Suufiyaa, like ‘Abd ul-Qaadir al-Jiilaanii [rh], Shihaab ud-Diin ‘Umar as-Suhrawardii [rh], Najm ud-Diin Kubraa [rh] and Khwaajah Yuusuf Hamadaanii [rh], emerged to champion Islaamic ethics and spirituality. A contemporary of these luminaries was Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh], who became the founder of the famous Chishtiyyah Suufii Order in India, which is today the subcontinent’s most influential Suufii Orders and also considered to be one the worlds most populous.

Mu’iin ud-Diin Muhammad ibn Hasan [rh], also known as Aftaab-i Mulk-i Hind (the ‘Sun of the Kingdom of India’), was born in Sistaan into a noble Muslim family. His father, Ghiyaath ud-Diin Hasan, was a successful businessman who also became renowned for his personal piety and Suufii practice. Keen to educate his son, he enrolled young Mu’iin ud-Diin at his local Madrasah where he received a thorough education in Arabic, Persian and all the tradtional Islaamic sciences. Despite the political uncertainty and social upheveal of the times, he successfully completed his elementary and intermediate-level Islaamic studies. He was barely fifteen when his father suddenly died and this forced his family to endure considerable financial hardship, like so many great savants before him. Fortunately, Mu’iin ud-Diin had inherited a garden and a water mill from his father and this earned him enough income to meet his daily expenses. Sadly though, soon thereafter his beloved mother also passed away.

Distraught and devastated by his loss, young Mu’iin ud-Diin sold his inheritance and distributed all the proceeds to the poor and the needy. He then travelled extensively in pursuit of Islaamic knowledge and wisdom. In addition to Bukhaaraa and Samarqand, where he visited the shrines of the famous Imaam Muhammad al-Bukhaarii [rh] and Imaam Abuu Mansuur al-Maaturiidii [rh], he also travelled to many other renowned centres of Islaamic learning and education, and studied under the guidance of scores of prominent ‘Ulamaa’ and Suufiyaa’. During this period he committed the entire Qur’aan to memory and became a proficient exponent of the traditional Islaamic sciences. On his arrival in Harwaan which was a prominent centre of Islaamic learning and scholarship

located on the outskirts of Niishaapuur, he encountered Khwaajah ‘Uthmaan Harwaanii [rh], who was a distinguished Islaamic scholar and prominent Suufii. Here he became a member of Khwaajah Harwaanii’s [rh] Suufii circle and spent the next two decades in his company. Under Khwaajah Harwaanii’s [rh] guidance, he mastered both the Zaahirii (exoteric ie. Sharii’ah) and Baatinii (esoteric ie. Haqiiqah) dimensions of Islaam, before travelling with his teacher to Makkah and Madiinah to perform the sacred Hajj (pilgrimage).

After staying in Harwaan for almost two decades, Mu’iin ud-Diin left Khwaajah Harwaanii’s [rh] company and travelled to Baghdaad, the capital of the ‘Abbaasid Khilaafah, to receive advanced training in Islaamic sciences and Tasawwuf. During his stay in Baghdaad he encountered many famous ‘Ulamaa’ and Suufiyaa’ like ‘Abd ul-Qaadir al-Jiilaanii [rh], Shihaab ud-Diin ‘Umar as-Suhrawardii (the founder of the Suhrawardiyyah Suufii Order), as well as Khwaajah Yuusuf Hamadaanii [rh] and Shaykh Abuu Sa’iid at-Tabriizii [rh]. Prior to this, he had also met the renowned Central Asian Suufii master Najm ud-Diin Kubraa [rh], the founder of the Kubrawiyyah Suufii Order, and studied Islaamic mystical thought and practices under his tutelage for around two and a half years. Thanks to his extensive education and training in traditional Islaamic sciences (Sharii’ah) and Tasawwuf (spirituality), Mu’iin ud-Diin [rh] soon established his reputation as a master of Tasawwuf and one of its most eloquent exponents.

From Baghdad, Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] proceeded to Isfahaan where he met another distinguished Suufii sage, Shaykh Mahmuud al-Isfahaanii [rh], who admired him for his profound knowledge and understanding of Sharii’ah and Tasawwuf. Here he also met one of his most famous disciples, Khwaajah Qutb ud-Diin Bakhtiyaar Kaakii [rh], who originally came to Isfahaan to join the company of Shaykh Mahmuud al-Isfahaanii [rh] but, on meeting Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh], changed his mind and instead pledged Bay’ah (spiritual allegiance) to him.

Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] was in his mid-forties when he moved from Isfahaan to Ghaznaa (in present-day Afghanistan) accompanied by a handful of disciples he had gathered around him. Ghaznaa was once the thriving capital of the Ghaznavid Sultanate, but it was now firmly in the grip of the Ghuurid rulers who had assumed control of that region after successfully ousting the last Ghaznavid ruler in 1186. On his arrival in Ghaznaa, Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] was surprised to encounter Khwaajah ‘Uthmaan Harwaanii [rh], his former mentor

and guide. Khwaajah Harwaanii [rh] urged him to proceed to India and disseminate the message of Islaam in that country.

Although Muslims first entered India during the early part of the eighth century under the inspirational leadership of the young and dynamic Muhammad ibn ul-Qaasim [rh], the majority of India's population were still Hindus, which no doubt encouraged Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] to go to India and disseminate the message of Islaam amongst its idolatrous inhabitants. That said, what finally compelled Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] to travel to that land was a decisive inspirational dream in which the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] appeared to him instructing him to proceed to India to teach and guide its indigenous people to Islaam. "O, Mu'iin ud-Diin! You are a helper of my religion. I entrust to you the country of Hind for there prevails darkness. Proceed to Ajmer and spread there the Way of Truth." He was immensely pleased with this mandate but wondered where Ajmer was situated, upon which the Holy Prophet [s] showed him the city, its distinctive fort, and its location. He was then bid farewell and, it is reported, given a pomegranate from Jannah.

Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] immediately left Ghaznaa and reached Lahore in 1190 CE. As a prominent regional centre of Islaamic learning and commerce, Lahore at the time was the home of some of the subcontinent's most prominent 'Ulamaa' and Suufiyaa'. Here Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] stayed for a brief period and often visited the tomb of Abul Hasan 'Alii al-Hujwiirii [rh] (who is better known as Daataa Ganj Bakhsh [rh]). Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] immersed himself in prayers and meditation for several weeks while in this blessed place, after which he moved to Multaan and stayed there for about five years.

During his stay in Multaan he gained proficiency in Sanskrit and a number of other prominent Hindu languages and dialects, and made preparations to travel further into India. It was during these travels that he attracted a considerable following. His asceticism and spirituality captured the imagination and admiration of people of all faiths, thus establishing his reputation as an eminent Islaamic scholar and practitioner of Tasawwuf. Having arrived in Delhi during the reign of the Sultaan Iltutmish, Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] moved from Delhi to Ajmer shortly thereafter with his band of devout followers.

At that time, Ajmer was ruled by Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the famous Rajput king, who initially refused to allow him to settle there. But soon people began to flock to Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] in increasing numbers seeing his saintly character,

kind treatment and many blessings. The local Hindus were so inspired by his divine teachings and simplicity that they began to embrace Islaam en-masse.

Soon thereafter Sultaan Shihaab ud-Diin Muhammad Ghowrii invaded India, and in the famous Battle of Tarain, defeated Prithvi Raj Chauhan. When Sultaan Shihaab ud-Diin came to know of the presence of Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] at Ajmer, he personally came to pay homage to him. Now settled in Ajmer, Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] married two wives, again at the direct instruction of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] who appeared to him in a dream saying, "O Mu'iin ud-Diin, You are a great preceptor of our religion. You should not depart from our Sunnah of marrying multiple wives." One marriage was with the daughter of Sayyid Wajiihuddin [rh], and another was with the daughter of the Hindu Raajaa (King). She had embraced Islaam at his hands and bore him two sons. He went on to have three sons altogether – Abuu Sa'iid, Fakhr ud-Diin and Husaam ud-Diin, and one daughter Biibii Jamaal.

Ajmer became an integral part of the Muslim Delhi Sultanate in 1196 CE. It is at this stage that Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] was increasingly influenced by the writings of the famous Hambalii 'Aalim and Suufii, ʿAbd-ullaah Anṣaarii [rh], whose famous work on the lives of the early Islaamic saints, the Tabaqaat us-Suufiyaa', played a significant role in shaping his worldview. By now, he was in his mid-fifties and decided to devote the rest of his life to the propagation of Islaam in the subcontinent.

Apart from his reputation of being a charismatic and compassionate spiritual preacher and teacher of superb moral character and deep learning, numerous Karaamaat (miracles and supernatural feats) are known of him including instantaneous miraculous travel over vast distances, clairvoyance, and visions of Malaa'ikah (Angels). But Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] was foremostly steeped in the traditional Islaamic sciences ('Uluum ush-Sharii'ah) and Tasawwuf, and served all without prejudice as a humble and gracious 'Aalim (scholar) and pious Suufii, who was motivated by no desire other than to win Allaah's good pleasure and disseminate the message of Islaam throughout India.

Though Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] was the founder of the Chishtiyyah Suufii order in India, he was not the originator of the Chishtiyyah Tariiqah as such. That credit must go to Khwaajah Abuu Is'haaq Shaamii Chishtii [rh], who was an outstanding exponent of Tasawwuf and a native of Chisht (a small town located towards the east of Herat in present-day Afghanistan). He inspired his prominent disciples to go and settle in different parts of Transoxiana and Khuraasaan and

establish Chishtiyyah lodges (Zaawiyyah) across that region. As a result, this Suufii Tariiqah (order) became very popular across Persia and Muslim Central Asia.

As with the other prominent Turuk (Suufii orders), the adherents of this Tariiqah traced their spiritual lineage back to the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] through Khaliif ‘Alii ibn Abii Taalib [r], who in turn had initiated the renowned Hasan al-Basrii [rh] into Tasawwuf according to the Prophetic model, who in turn conveyed this knowledge to his Suufii successors. Thus the Chishtiyyah Suufiyaa’ always emphasized the importance of following the Prophetic Sunnah in any and all spiritual quests.

After settling in Ajmer, Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] and his disciples mixed freely with the locals, serving on their needs first and then engaging them in discussion on religious and spiritual matters. As a fierce critic of all forms of racial and cultural segregation, he vehemently opposed the Hindu caste system as well as the chauvinism displayed by some Muslim rulers, and passionately argued that all human beings are equal in the sight of Allaah. “We are all children of Aadam and Hawwaa’,” he argued, “and both Aadam and Hawwaa’ were created from dust.’’

Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] led a simple, austere but active life, and never failed to emphasise the need for sincerity and personal self-purification first. Likewise, he encouraged all his disciples to regularly engage in Khalwah (spiritual retreat, isolation) and so strive to move closer to Allaah by distancing oneself from worldly preoccupation. His message of love, peace, compassion, equality, freedom and brotherhood struck a chord with Muslims and Hindus alike. Thanks to his untiring efforts, millions of non-Muslims embraced Islaam and an equal number of Muslims reformed their lives.

Moreover, Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] emphasised the regular performance of the fundamental Islaamic laws, rites and practices such as the five daily Salaah’s, Sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadaan), Zakaah (obligatory charity), Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) as well as strict adherence to the Sharii’ah in all matters. He was such a rigorous adherent of the Prophetic norms and practices (Sunnah) that he married twice in his advanced age merely to emulate the Prophet [s] and also urged his disciples to fulfil this important Prophetic Sunnah. Mu’iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] is also notable for having been one of the first major Suufiyaa’ to formally allow his followers to incorporate the use of music in their devotions, liturgies, and hymns to Allaah, which he did in order to make what was seen as a

foreign Arab faith more relatable to the indigenous Hindu peoples who had recently entered the religion .

Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii's [rh] teachings were insightful, profound and practical. He would say to his disciples, "Those in whom these three qualities are to be found have certainly been befriended by Allaah. First, generosity like the generosity of the ocean. Second, compassion like the compassion of the sun. Third, humility like the humility of the earth." Emphasising the importance of saintly company, he would say, "The company of the righteous is better than a righteous deed, just as the company of the evil is worse than an evil deed." In setting the bar for spiritual attainment he said, "The lowest stage and degree of the Suufii, with respect to love, is that the Divine attributes (Sifaat) appear in him. The highest degree for the Suufii, with respect to love, is that if someone requests something of him, he provides it, by Allaah's leave, through the power of saintly miracles." As regards honouring humanity he warned, "All sins committed do not harm an individual more than looking down upon one's fellow human being." With respect to duty to one's own soul he advised, "There are four cardinal virtues of the individual self: refraining from begging in the state of poverty; displaying the attitude of being well-fed when feeling hungry; maintaining cheerfulness in the time of sorrow; and showing friendship even to one's enemy." When asked who a Suufii is, he said, "The true Suufii is every servant of Allaah who chances on someone in need and does not leave him wanting." On another occasion he said, "The sign of the Suufii is that he befriends death, foregoes comfort and eschews the frivolous company of people because he is immersed in remembrance (Dhikr) of his Lord." On Divine love he would say, "The heart of a true lover of Allaah constantly burns with the fire of love, so much so that whatever intrudes upon its sanctity is burnt to ashes." And regarding the pre-eminence of Salaah in the spiritual quest, he emphasized, "Without performing Salaah diligently, none can approach Allaah ! This because Salaah is the Mi'raaj (ie. means of ascension into heaven) of the truly pious in their attempt to approach the Divine."

His personal character traits were admirable. He had a forgiving nature and showed love, regard, and respect to all, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. He was inclusive and cosmopolitan in outlook, and a man of generous disposition, taking special pleasure in helping the poor and the needy. He was renowned for his hospitality and myriads of people of the city, with no ostensible means of subsistence, depended upon the Langar (ie. free food distribution) services he rendered daily, which he most often cooked with his own hands. He himself ate very little, fasting throughout the year, and while he clothed all those

who came to him, he wore patched clothes himself. While very fond of Salaah, he would ensure reading the Qur'aan twice a day at the very least and was very particular about maintaining his Wuduu' at all times. He took no rest nor respite for seventy long years. He showed utmost concern for the well-being of his spiritual disciples (Muriiduun) and was greatly loved by his spiritual guides (Murshiduun) and teachers. He exemplified the prophetic attribute of 'love for all of Allaah's creation' and there are so many anecdotes about his care even for animals and insects.

After more than forty years of preaching and propagating Islaam in the Indian subcontinent, Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] and his disciples had completely transformed the fortunes of Islaam throughout that vast region. His tolerant and compassionate behavior towards the local Hindu population was one of the major reasons behind the remarkable rates of conversion to Islaam at his hand. His great efforts and achievements earned him widespread acclaim even during his own lifetime. Prominent rulers, like Sultaan Qutb ud-Diin and Sultaan Shams ud-Diin Iltutmish of the Mamluuk dynasty, revered him, as did the Mughal Emperors, including Akbar the Great who would travel to and from Ajmer on foot out of respect for Mu'iin ud-Diin [rh], the great saint of Ajmer. The later Mughal emperors like Jahaangir, Shaah Jahaan and Awrangzeb [rh] became adherents of the Chishtiyyah Tariiqah and regularly went to Ajmer to pay homage to him.

Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh] died in Ajmer at the ripe old age of ninety-seven. After his death, his mission was continued by his disciples, including Hamiid ud-Diin Suufii [rh] and Khwaajah Qutb ud-Diin Bakhtiyaar Kaakii [rh] among others. Over time, this Tariiqah spread throughout the subcontinent, thanks to prominent Chishtiyyah Suufiis like Fariid ud-Diin Mas'uud Ganj-i-Shakar Ghariib [rh] (Baabaa Fariid), Nizhaam ud-Diin Awliyaa [rh], Amiir Khusraw [rh], 'Abd ul-Qudduus Gangowhii [rh] and Burhaan ud-Diin Ghariib [rh]. Even Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindii [rh] and Shaah Walii-ul-laah [rh], arguably the greatest 'Ulamaa' of India, were deeply influenced by the religious ideas and thoughts of Khwaajah Mu'iin ud-Diin Chishtii [rh]. The Chishtii Tariiqah has arguably grown to be the largest of the main Suufii orders in the world.

3) **Bahaa' ud-Diin Naqshband [rh]**
717-791 AH [1317-1389 CE]

Although Muslims first entered Central Asia during the reign of Khaliif 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab [r], the Islaamic presence in that region was not consolidated

until the time of Khaliif ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan [r]. The Muslim conquest of Central Asia paved the way for a strongly Islaamic culture and identity to emerge in that region. So much so that Central Asia produced some of the Muslim world’s most influential scholars, thinkers and personalities, like Imaam al-Bukhaarii [rh], al-Khwaarizmii [rh] and Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh]. Amiir Timuur (Tamerlane), who was one of the most successful conquerors in history, was also born and raised on the cold, harsh and intimidating steppes of Central Asia. Known for his thirst for power and military conquest, this fearless military hardman none-theless had a soft spot for Tasawwuf. This is hardly surprising given the fact that Central Asia had produced some of the Muslim world’s most famous and influential Suufii sages.

Indeed, Tasawwuf became part and parcel of the Central Asian religious landscape during the early days of Islaam; thus prominent early Central Asian Suufiyaa’ like Abuu Sa’iid ibn Abul Khayr [rh] of Mayhaanah (located in present-day Turkmenistan) played a pivotal role in the development of a unique Central Asian Suufii identity. Thanks to them, a number of indigenous Turuk (schools of Tasawwuf) emerged and became established in that region during the thirteenth and fourteen centuries. One such school of Tasawwuf was the Naqshbandiyyah Tariiqah, which was championed by Khwaajah Naqshband [rh], and it is today widely considered to be one of the Muslim world’s most influential Suufii traditions.

Muhammad ibn Muhammad Bahaa ud-Diin al-Bukhaarii [rh], better known as Khwaajah Naqshband [rh], was born in 1317 CE in the village of Qasr Hinduwaan, not far from Bukhaaraa in modern-day Uzbekistan. When he was a child, he was blessed by Shaykh Muhammad Baabaa Sammaasii [rh], an eminent local saint, who foretold that the young boy would one day become a shining star of Tasawwuf and Ma’rifah (gnosis). “This child is to be a guide for all humanity,” Baabaa Sammaasii [rh] said, “His secrets are going to reach every sincere and pious Muslim. The heavenly knowledge that Allaah is going to shower upon him will reach every house in this land. Allaah’s name shall be engraved (Naqsh) on his heart. And the Order will take its name from this engraving.”

At the age of 18, Khwaajah Naqshband was sent by his grandfather to the village of Sammaas to serve the Shaykh. He relates how he himself would arise hours before the Fajr Salaah, perform Wuduu’, and after performing the Sunnah Salaah, he would go into Sajdah (prostration), supplicating to Allaah in his heart, saying, “O my Lord, give me the power to carry the difficulties and the pain of Your

love." Then he would proceed to perform the Fajr Salaah with his Shaykh, Baabaa Sammaasii [rh]. One day the Shaykh looked at him and said, "O my son, you must change the method of your supplication. Instead say, 'O Allaah, grant Your pleasure to this weak servant,' because Allaah does not like His servants to be immersed in difficulties. Although Allaah in His Wisdom might give some difficulties to His servants to test them, the servant must not ask to be in difficulties. This would not be respectful to your Lord." This perspective dramaticallty changed Khwaajah Naqshband's perspectives of the spiritual path.

After completing his early education in the traditional Islaamic sciences including Fiqh, Tafsiir, Hadiith and Tasawwuf under the tutelage of Baabaa Sammaasii [rh], Khwaajah Naqshband travelled to Bukhaaraa to pursue higher education. He married during his stay in Bukhaaraa and eventually returned home after completing his formal Islaamic studies. He then went to Nasaf where Sayyid Amiir Kulaal [rh], a prominent 'Aalim and spiritual successor (khaliifah) of Baabaa Sammaasii [rh], lived and taught the traditional Islaamic sciences and Tasawwuf. Sayyid Kulaal [rh] was a humble man who earned his living as a potter, and under his guidance, Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] mastered Suufii thought and practice.

After Sayyid Kulaal's [rh] death, his mantle passed to his able disciple, Mawlaanaa 'Aarif Dikkaaraanii [rh], whom Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] served for a few years more before travelling to Samarqand where he joined the Suhbah (company) of a Yaasawii Suufii named Hazhrat Khaliil Ataa [rh], whom he had first seen in an inspired dream. Regarding his association with Hazhrat Khaliil Ataa [rh], Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] relates: "He ordered me to help the needy, and to serve the weak, and to motivate the heart of the broken-hearted. He ordered me to keep to humbleness and humility and tolerance. I kept his orders and I spent many days of my life in that manner. Then he ordered me to take care of animals, to cure their sicknesses, to clean their wounds, and to assist them in finding their provision. I kept on that way until I reached the state that, when I saw an animal in the street, I would stop and make way for it."

It so happened that Hazhrat Khaliil Ataa [rh] gained political power in 1340 CE and became the ruler of Transoxiania. During this period, Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] served him for twelve years as his spiritual disciple, until Hazhrat Khaliil Ataa [rh] was ousted from power in 1347 CE. During this period of considerable socio-political uncertainty, Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] moved to Ziwartuun where he received further advanced training in Tasawwuf.

Known for his excellent character and personal piety, the Khwaajah [rh] soon rose to prominence. The local population revered him for his deep knowledge of Islaam and his profound moral and spiritual qualities. His advanced training in Sharii'ah and other Islaamic sciences as well as Tasawwuf, coupled with his remarkable ability to serenely endure gruelling hardship and self-renunciation, won him much admiration from his teachers and Suufii Murshiduun (mentors) alike.

Although Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] led a life of renunciation, self-sacrifice and single-minded devotion to the Prophetic Sunnah and Sharii'ah of Islaam, he knew more than anyone else that one cannot attain success in any sphere of human endeavour without Divine grace and favour. Thus, according to Khwaajah Naqshband [rh], one cannot choose to be a Suufii for, strictly speaking, a spiritual gift is always granted rather than gained - although one should never despair of the mercy and grace of Divine Providence. Like all other great Suufiyaa' of the past, he fully understood and accepted this fact. Indeed, Sayyid Amiir Kulaal [rh], who was one of Khwaajah Naqshband's [rh] foremost teachers and spiritual guides, had travelled more than eight miles every week, on foot, to attend religious classes during his training. After twenty years of travelling back and forth, his teacher eventually told him that he had been granted the gift of Ma'rifah (gnosis) and spiritual enlightenment. In the same way, Sayyid Aamir Kulaal [rh] put Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] through similar grueling trials before confirming that he too had been granted the gift of Ruuhaaniyyah (spiritual maturation) and Ma'rifah (gnosis).

The Khwaajah [rh] was so diligent in his practice of Islaam and morally disciplined that he even refused to accept food or gifts offered to him by the local rulers, for fear that they may have been obtained illegally or oppressively. Once, when he was asked why he refused to keep even a servant, he retorted, "Ownership is incompatible with sainthood." A strict adherent of Islaam, he observed a simple lifestyle and insisted on self-reliance and self-contentment. He detested the hedonistic lifestyle of the masses which he warned was alienating them from Allaah and thus called them to reform their ways through Tasawwuf which he defined as the path of 'al-Urwat ul-Wuthqaa', that is, 'an unbreakable bond' with Allaah which implied strict adherence to the Qur'aan and the Sunnah. In other words, according to Khwaajah Naqshband [rh], the fountainhead of Islaamic spirituality and gnosis was nothing other than the Qur'aan and the Prophetic Sunnah. His assertion of the supremacy of the Qur'aan and the Prophetic Sunnah over all other sources of guidance was not only significant, it was also profoundly reformative because, at the time, many degenerate Suufiyaa'

tried to dispense with these two fundamental sources of Islaam in their quest for the so-called ultimate spiritual experience of 'union with the Divine'. Likewise, Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] was an uncompromising exponent of the Islaamic principle of Divine Unity (Tawhiid). He also made a clear distinction between knowledge and understanding of spirituality - as opposed to feeling and experiencing spirituality. He considered the former state to be the pinnacle of Tawhiid and the latter to be the peak of Ma'rifah (gnosis).

According to the Khwaajah's [rh] biographer, 'Abd ur-Rahmaan Jaami' [rh], his spiritual path was first unveiled to him in the form of a vision when he was a young man. In that vision he saw three lamps and a throne. The three lamps represented all the Suufii luminaries of the past, while the throne was none other than the eminent Suufii 'Abd ul-Khaaliq Ghujdawaanii [rh]. He was informed that he had been specially blessed and that he would one day become a great Suufii and an influential disseminator of Tasawwuf and Ma'rifah. The following words of advice were then offered to him, "Whatever happens, always follow the path marked out by divine command and prohibition (ie. Sharii'ah). Keep a firm resolve and never abandon the Prophetic example (Sunnah) and the practice of good works (al-A'maal us-Saalihah). Steer clear of heretical innovations (Bid'ah), take the Ahaadiith of the blessed chosen Muhammad [s] for your guide, and make a profound study of all that has been recorded about Allaah's messenger and his Sahaabah." Thus Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] was chosen by Providence to pursue and disseminate Tasawwuf and Ma'rifah in the light of the Qur'aan and the Prophetic Sunnah to humanity at large.

Following in the footsteps of his eminent predecessors such as 'Abd ul-Khaaliq Ghujdawaanii [rh], the Khwaajah [rh] pursued a spiritual path which was in complete harmony with normative Islaam. He shunned the company of those mystics who became embroiled in heretical or reprehensible innovations (Bid'ah). Initiated by Khwaajah Yuusuf Hamadaanii [rh] back in the eleventh century, the Naqshbandiyyah Suufii Order (Tariiqah) evolved and spread across Central Asia under the stewardship of eminent Suufiyaa' like 'Abdullaah Barqii [rh], Hasan Andaqii [rh], Ahmad Yaasaawii [rh] and 'Abd ul-Khaaliq Ghujdawaanii [rh], before Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] emerged to become its most influential champion. The mystical philosophy and spiritual methodology of the early Naqshbandiyyah Suufiyaa' was summed up by 'Abd ul-Khaaliq Ghujdawaanii [rh] when he said, "Learn Islaamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) and the traditions of the Prophet (Ahaadith). Do not mix with illiterate Suufiyaa', offer Salaah in congregation, do not seek after fame, do not accept any formal public office, do not be a surety for anybody, do not mix with rulers or princes, do not

construct a khaanqaah (Suufii lodge), do not listen to too much mystic music (Samaa'), do not condemn mystic music, eat only what is permitted (Halaal), do not marry a woman who desires material comforts, avoid laughter because laughter kills one's heart. Your heart should be full of grief, your body as if that of an ailing person, your eyes wet with tears, your actions sincere, your prayers earnest, your dress tattered, your company Suufiyaa', your wealth poverty, your house the Masjid, and your friend Allaah."

Although the Suufii teachings and practices championed by Khwaajah Yuusuf Hamadaanii [rh] and his illustrious disciples inspired considerable enthusiasm in Islaamic practice across Central Asia, the absence of a unified approach to Islaamic spirituality (Tasawwuf) prevented the masses from fully harvesting all the fruits from its blessed tree. As one of the most prominent Suufiyaa' of his generation, Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] was the most able and qualified person to unify and consolidate the different strands of Tasawwuf which then prevailed in Central Asia. And although he had an extensive knowledge of Islaam and was also spiritually gifted, the Khwaajah [rh] knew that the task he faced was not an easy one. Thus, after some deliberation, he initiated a mass Islaamic spiritual movement which subsequently became known as the Naqshbandiyyah Suufii Order (Tariiqah), and in so doing he contributed significantly to the widespread dissemination of Islaam, and particularly Tasawwuf, throughout Muslim Central Asia.

However, unlike Jalaal ud-Diin Ruumii [rh] or Fariid ud-Diin Attaar [rh] for instance, both of whom were great Suufiyaa' and prolific writers, the Khwaajah [rh] did not author much; rather he distinguished himself as a religious reformer par excellence. As a devout Muslim, he was horrified to see how Islaamic teachings were often grossly violated in his homeland, and this prompted him to instigate a mass campaign to revive authentic Islaamic practice. In so doing he hoped to arrest the corrosive forces of materialism and hedonism in that part of the Islaamic world.

That said, innumerous sayings of Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] have been recorded for the benefit of posterity. He once advised, "Our method is 'solitude in the crowd", (Khalwat dar anjuman) which means to remain busy in Allaah's adoration while living in society; to be busy in His invocation outwardly and inwardly; to be aware of the state of our inmost heart and unaware of the entire phenomenal world around us." Regarding Tasawwuf, he explained, "Three things constitute the Suufii Path : Muraaqabah (Reflection and meditation), Muhaasabah (self-scrutiny and accounting) and Mushaahadah (contemplation of the Divine).

Muraqabah means forgetting the self to concentrate on the Creator of all. Muhaasabah means critique of the self in every moment. Mushaahadah means beholding the Divine Perfection with the eye of the heart. In the states of Qabd (contracting difficulty) we behold the attributes of Allaah's Majesty (Jalaal), and in states of Bast (expansive prosperity) we behold the attributes of Divine Beauty (Jamaal)." On achieving the ultimate goal, he explained, "Ardency of love essentially requires that the lover persistently remains in quest of the beloved. The dearer the beloved is the more woe, anguish, and afflictions will be experienced on the way to her. Therefore, on the mystic path, the Saalik (loving aspirant) should remain ever restive and uneasy in his quest for Allaah". Once asked about how to distinguish a true Suufii Murshid (Guide) from a charlatan, he cleverly answered, "The Awliyaa' (saints) who have truly been gifted Divine mysteries, conceal it. But those who have been deprived (ie. have not attained sainthood), pretentiously publicise it."

The movement launched by the Khwaajah [rh] was so popular that over time it became one of the most influential of all Suufii traditions, along with the Qaadiriyyah and Chistiyyah Orders. Inspired by Khwaajah Naqshband [rh], the adherents of his Suufii tradition spread across Central Asia, as well as the Indian subcontinent where Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindii [rh], the renowned 16th century Muslim sage and reformer of India, became one of its foremost exponents and disseminators. Other famous Indian Muslim adherents of the Naqshbandiyyah Tariiqah included Sultaan Jahaangir and Shaah Walii'ullaah [rh] of Delhi. In addition to this, 'Abd ur-Rahmaan Jaamii [rh], the prominent Persian writer and poet, was an adherent of this Tariiqah. Most importantly, the Great 'Uthmaanii Khaliif's (Ottomans) were also adherents of the Naqshbandii Tariiqah and established this tradition as the preeminent Suufii order in Eastern Europe. The Tariiqah also spread extensively through the Middle Eastern Arab lands and eminent 'Ulamaa' like 'Abd ul-Ghanii an-Naabuluusii [rh] were affiliated to this Suufii tradition, while in North Africa 'Amiir 'Abd ul-Qaadir [rh] and Muhammad ibn 'Alii as-Saanuusii [rh] were also adherents of the Naqshbandiyyah Tariiqah. Additionally, Imaam Shaamil [rh] of Daghestaan, the celebrated Caucasian warrior and freedom-fighter, was an adherent of this Suufii Order. Indeed, when Islaam was being brutally suppressed across Central Asia by the Stalinist rulers of the Soviet Empire, it was the followers of this Tariiqah who kept the torch of Islaam burning across that region. The Naqshbandiyyah Tariiqah has also today gained innumerous followers in Western Europe and America.

Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Islaamic spiritualist movement initiated by Khwaajah Naqshband [rh] has few parallels in the history of Islaam. After an illustrious life of devotion and service to Islaam, he breathed his last on the 2nd of March 1389 CE at the age of seventy-two and was buried in his native village in Qasr Hinduwaan (in modern Uzbekistan), which was then renamed Qasr ‘Aarifaan out of respect to him. A mausoleum was later erected in his memory which stands to this day.



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